

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

JOURNAL OF  
THE TRANSACTIONS  
OF  
The Victoria Institute,  
OR,  
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

---

EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,  
CAPTAIN FRANCIS W. H. PETRIE, F.G.S., &c.

---

VOL. XXV.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute.)

INDIA: W. THACKER & Co. UNITED STATES: G. T. PUTNAM'S SONS, N. Y.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: G. ROBERTSON & Co., LIM.

CANADA: DAWSON BROS., *Montreal*.

S. AFRICA: JUTA & Co., *Cape Town*.

PARIS: GALIGNANI.

1892.

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

## ORDINARY MEETING.

D. HOWARD, ESQ., D.L., F.C.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed :—

The following Paper was then read by the Author.

### *ON THE REALITY OF THE SELF.* By W. L. COURTNEY, M.A., LL.D.

THE common language and the formal literature of all nations are full of such terms as “mind,” “soul,” “spirit,” the peculiar possession and the peculiar privilege of man as standing at the head of the animal world. What is this mind? Where is it? Is it a reality, in and by itself, as we ordinarily assume? If so what is its precise relation to the physical organism which is undoubtedly common to other animals besides men? Is man right in thinking and calling himself “a living soul,” or is this the self-deception and the conceit of one who is himself the prophet and interpreter of the world in which he is placed, and who therefore naturally gives himself the pride of place? Is man, as an animal has so often been declared to be, an automaton, a superior sort of machine, wound up, set a-going and kept in order in a fashion, which of course to the machine itself is inexplicable? These are large questions which can only be partially answered: the solutions of such problems involve long chains of argument, the conclusions of which in the time allowed me I must often dogmatically assume.

Of the two questions—*where is the mind? what is the mind?* the first *can* be answered, and the second *cannot* be answered in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. If it be assumed that there is such a thing as mind, science will only

allow us to put it in one locality, viz., the brain. More precisely, we can say that the real seat and home of mind is in the cerebral cortex, the rind of gray nervous matter which surrounds and envelops the white matter of the brain. But I must remind you that such language as that the brain is the "seat" or "home" of mind, or, as we sometimes hear, the "organ" of mind, is merely poetical and metaphorical language. No one would pretend that this was a precise and scientific language; it is in reality quite as metaphorical and poetic as the assertion that the body is the "prison" or "tenement" or "tabernacle" of the soul, which Plato thought gave a true account of the relation between the two. But that in some real sense the mind is in the brain—of this there can be no doubt, because we have no recorded instance of thought taking place *without* a brain. We talk indeed sometimes of feeling and emotion—which are conscious states of mind—as belonging elsewhere, to the heart, for example. A "man of heart" signifies a man who is sensitive and affectionate and emotional, and falling in love is in the language of poetry and common life supposed to be some feverish condition of the heart. We even distinguish between "feeling" and "intellect" by ascribing the first to the heart, and the second to the head, as when we say that "morality is rather a matter of the heart than of the head." But except in the language of poets, except to Aristotle and Hobbes, both of whom thought that the heart was the central organ of intelligence, such statements are absurd. The heart is a pump with chambers and valves—a pump and nothing more. The real "seat" of *conscious* mental states—sensations, perceptions, feelings, volitions, ideas—is the brain. Mr. Lewes (*Physical Basis of Mind*) it is true, thinks it proper to say that a certain "soul" belongs also to the spinal cord, because it is by itself capable of reflex activity: but at all events it is not the seat of *conscious* activity, and it is with conscious states that we have to do. The mind is in the brain.

Our other question, however, what is the mind? cannot be thus summarily answered, nor indeed can it ever be answered, except in part. We cannot define by thought that which is thought, any more than a man can say exactly what his own personality means. What is the mind, therefore, is an absurd question, if we want a direct, immediate answer. But we can get some sort of answer if we ask the question in an indirect way, if we ask, for instance, whether there is evidence to prove that there is

a real, substantial, unphysical thing called mind, and if so, what is the relation in which it stands to the substantial and physical thing called brain. By discovering what the mind is not, we can indirectly get at what it is: for the rest, we can only fall back on the verdict of immediate consciousness. *Γνώθι σεαυτὸν* is the only ultimate method of a true psychology.

“ Once read thy own breast right,  
And thou hast done with fears ;  
Man gets no other light  
Search he a thousand years.  
Sink in thyself ! there ask what ails thee at that shrine ! ”

The exact problem before us, together with an attempted solution, is so well illustrated by Descartes that it is worth while to refer to his historic dogma on the subject. Is mind real? Nay, is it not the only reality? Such is practically the outcome of Descartes' celebrated “*Discours de la Méthode*.” Descartes had determined amid a changing sea of doubts, to find some solid rock or even some floating spar to which to cling. What is the one reality, the one unchanging fact in all that a man knows and thinks? It is that he is conscious, and that therefore he exists. All thought testifies at least to this fact—even the sceptical doubt itself, for it too is a conscious attitude or phase which also argues existence. *Cogito ergo sum, je pense donc je suis*—here is at least a fixed point of certainty which no scepticism can shake. Whatever else a man may doubt, however much he may mistrust the evidence of his senses in telling him of the world in which he lives; however much there may be in him “the blank misgivings of a creature, moving about in worlds unrealised,” still on one point there can be no shadow of a cloud—that his existence is proved by his thinking. Is this but a meagre result? But see how much is involved for Descartes in this dogma. I think therefore I am. There must, therefore, be a self, this self is real, and the real essence of this real self is thinking. It follows that man is a living, thinking soul, which is immaterial and imperishable. Such conclusions can no longer be called meagre, for there is in them the foundation of a psychology and even of a religion. Nor did Descartes hesitate to localise the soul thus proved; it exists in the brain, in that small lobe or gland which is called the pineal gland or the conarion.

But if the mind, with all its characteristic modes of activity, be thus of a nature absolutely distinct from the body or material brain, the one being spiritual and immaterial, while

the other is corporeal and mortal, how are the relations of mind to body to be satisfactorily explained? There are obvious interactions between the two elements; the body affects the mind, when we suffer for instance from a headache, and the mind affects the body, as for instance when we will to move an arm or a leg. If the two elements are absolutely antithetical, how can they thus influence one another? It was left to the acuteness of a woman to put this difficulty to Descartes: the objection is found in one of the letters which that royal blue-stocking, Elizabeth, the Princess Palatine, wrote to the philosopher. But no answer is forthcoming, until the followers of Descartes, Geulincx and Malebranche brought forward their singular theory of Occasionalism. The solution propounded is this:—It is God who unites the two dissimilar things, body and soul. On the occasion of a physical stimulus, God suggests to the mind the appropriate sensation, and on the occasion of a volition, God suggests or brings about the appropriate muscular movement. Thus the Divine Being is held to be always interfering, as it were, to keep human life and activity going. All action is his action, just as all mental states are his states. It is a desperate theory, but unless one is frankly disposed to accept a dualism of ultimate principles, it is in some shape or other not an unusual one. Leibnitz proposes a variation of the theory in his celebrated “*consentement préétabli*” or pre-established harmony. In order to get rid of the necessity of constant and repeated interference, Leibnitz proposes to regard body and soul as two clocks which are wound up so as always to keep time with each other. The immediate action of God is thus that of the clockmaker who originally winds up and sets the two timepieces. Then for the rest of their respective lives they exactly correspond, and the possibility of interaction between body and soul is resolved into an exact equivalence and correspondence of respective functions.

In a modern world, as might be expected, men of science and philosophers have grown impatient of explanations like these. They either tell us not to ask impossible questions and to be content with noting down and tabulating the various relations which experience gives us as existing between mind and body (such is the position of what is generally called Positivism) or else they frankly cut out one member of the antithesis and bid us regard mental activities and the whole sphere of consciousness as in some sense *produced by* or the *result* of material movements or finally as

the *shadow* of those material movements in consciousness. Thus sensation becomes the effect of which molecular agitation in the nerves is the cause. This is usually called Materialism. But it is in reality useless to tell us not to ask questions which science stigmatises as impossible and absurd. Impossible questions will nevertheless be asked, and science and philosophy will appear to have failed, unless some sort of answer is forthcoming. If then we turn to the more definite answer of Materialism, we have to try to imagine how mental states can be the products of movement in material molecules, just as a carpet is the product of the loom. Is Thought a secretion of the brain, just as perspiration is the secretion of sudatory glands, and tears the secretion of the tear-ducts? But the secretory product of the brain is the fluid found in certain of its cavities, and this fluid is no more like a mental process than the deficiency in gastric juice is like a feeling of indigestion. And if we put the theory in a more refined form and say that nerve-commotion is the product of the molecular activity of the brain, still a neural shock or nerve-commotion is not what we are conscious of in sensation. The language of the Materialists appears thus almost meaningless, as an explanation of all those mental processes of which we are intuitively aware. And so some of these scientific psychologists, as, *e.g.*, Mr. G. H. Lewes and Mr. Bain, seek to amend their theory somewhat, and speak of *equivalence* and *identity*, rather than of causation and production. The mind and brain stand to one another, they tell us, as convex and concave sides of the same arc. The two aspects are of one identical thing. Viewed from one position the arc is concave, from another it is convex: and so viewed from different standpoints the same phenomenon is now a material motion, and now a conscious process of the mind. We ought to speak of a "double-faced unity" showing itself both as mental and as corporeal, having one aspect which is spiritual and another which is material. This is plausible at all events; nor is there any way of either proving or disproving the theory, unless we have grounds for saying that the mind has a reality of its own apart from the material embodiment, and that we have evidence to show it to be within its own sphere distinct and supreme. Can we bring any arguments to bear upon this reality of mind, separate and separable from the nervous mechanism? I think we can, and these arguments shall be drawn from different sources, and illustrate different aspects of the question.

I. In the first place let me refer to a doctrine which is generally considered to support the materialistic thesis. It is that of the development of mind, which may perhaps be held to be the great "discovery" of the modern psychologists. It is clear that just as there is a development of the physical frame and the nervous activities, from the ascidian up to man, so too is there a development of intelligence. In man's case, too, as he grows in body, so does he grow in mental power, and as he decays in body so, too, does his mental vigour decay. But this is only true when stated generally and if we look a little more closely, the facts hardly seem to warrant the conclusion which the Materialist urges that the development of the mind is the development of the nervous system. At certain epochs of life the evolution of the brain seems to stand far in advance of the mind; at others, the mind appears to have overtaken and passed by the stage reached by its physical substratum. During a long period of life the growth of mental powers is constant and solid, while the growth of the physical basis has nearly ceased. Take the case of a child. When it is born it has a far more complete and advanced nervous organism than the most fully equipped of other young animals. But judged by its sensations and its perceptions, it is much more stupid and insensate than the puppy or the kitten. The human infant has apparently a mental condition something like a dreamless sleep varied by unmeaning sensations, and yet it possesses a nervous mechanism complex and active enough to do anything. In a few years the mind has suddenly blossomed forth in a marvellous way, but there has been but little change in the so-called physical basis. No new organs have been formed within the cranium; there is an increase of the brain substance, but it is a gradually diminishing increase which by no means corresponds with the enormous mental growth. Take again the case of maturity, the "middle life" of man. During this time the nervous matter undergoes scarcely any discernible development. Nothing that the microscope or electro-meter can detect distinguishes the brain of the man of twenty-five from that of the man of fifty. A few grammes of weight have perhaps been added to it during the whole period. But is there not usually a considerable development of mind during this time? Has not the judgment widened and the mental powers expanded? Or again, old age presents us, it is true, with a steady decline of the physical vigour, but it is doubtful whether the decay of the mental powers in any sense keeps pace with it. On the contrary, while the old man is getting



physically feebler day by day, while he can daily do with less sleep and less exercise, less food and less excitement, as might be expected in one in whom the forces which make for life are already spent or fast waning, is it not the fact that his mental vigour remains comparatively unimpaired and that his judgment and his kindness and his toleration are such that the younger gladly seek counsel from his maturer mind? It is then absurd to say that the evolution of the mind *is* the evolution of the nervous system, if it be meant that each mental phase, whether of increase or decrease, keeps time and pace with nervous growth or decay: for it is clear that the stages of the development of mind do not fully correspond with those of the development of the nervous mechanism any more than its gradual failure corresponds exactly with the failure of nervous energy. And thus the concave and convex theory, the subjective and objective aspect of one identical phenomenon or double-faced unity, does not appear to be exactly true to the facts.

II. There is, however, much greater and more significant evidence to prove that the mind has laws of its own, which are not those of the physical mechanism. It appears that there are certain elements which necessarily enter into what we mean by an intelligent consciousness which have nothing like them in the nervous material mechanism. According to Kant, knowledge can only arise if two elements are contributed to its growth: on the one side there is a material factor, on the other side there is a formal or mental factor. The mind has laws of its own, in accordance with which it works, and these laws are *not* the laws of that material element which it assimilates and on which it feeds. So in the same way we can assert that consciousness involves powers, faculties and elements which depend upon itself, and these cannot be accounted for by any enumeration of material mechanical processes. There are, for instance, certain mental products for which it would be difficult to find correspondent nervous processes. What nervous process could be held to correspond to the feeling of moral obligation or duty, or the sentiment of justice, or the love of truth, or the higher æsthetic feelings, or deliberate choice and acts of will in the higher sense? But there are humbler and more ordinary phenomena than these, which are exemplified in all our daily life, to which it is worth while to pay attention.

1. We will begin with a very elementary element in the acquisition of knowledge, viz., Attention. It is, of course, plain, that unless we pay attention to the phenomena that

come before us, they will come and go without leaving any trace, or communicating any data to our stock of mental acquisitions. But elementary though Attention may be, it is, notwithstanding, very difficult to explain its functions and its character. Psychologically, Attention seems due to a more or less conscious effort of mind which is directed to the more striking characteristics of the sensations which come before it. But again, there is nothing so capricious as Attention. Sometimes we by no means attend to the merely striking characteristics, but to any chance quality which for some reason or other engages us, to the exclusion of other qualities. Sometimes, again, Attention is apparently habitual or only semi-conscious; at other times, it appears impossible without a serious volitional effort. But, though we may labour to explain Attention psychologically, it is a far harder task for the physiologist. If all mental conditions were the material result or effect of molecular agitation within the nerves, it is very difficult to say why some forms of nervous agitation should produce "Attention," while other forms exactly similar, so far as their material character goes, should fail to get themselves registered within the brain. We are looking upon some scene or landscape, or, to talk a scientific language, various nerve messages are proceeding from the end-organs of sense, which have been excited by external stimuli: we attend to some features in this landscape; we notice a particular tree, or figure, or colour, not always because it is striking, but for some capricious fancy of ours. How can this be, if there be not a mind within us, with laws of its own, which has indeed a nervous mechanism, but is not the slave of the mechanism? Otherwise, one would think that all nerve-messages ought either to have equal values or to stimulate attention in equal proportion to their vividness—neither of which is the case. The only law, itself somewhat doubtful, is *Weber's Law*, which may be expressed as follows: Some ratio, although quantitatively different, is believed to exist for every sense. That is to say, it is true of every sense that not every change in objective stimulus occasions a change in subjective sensation, but that every change in stimulus must bear a certain definite ratio (varying in the different senses) to the already existing stimulus, before the intensity of the sensation, as a conscious state, changes. Differently stated, not absolute stimuli are felt, but only relative.

It is all very well to tell us that the seat of attention and concentration lies in the motor centres

in the brain, but this does not explain its activity. And if the answer of the physiologist be that there are certain associations set up between particular nerve-currents, and that when these run together they rouse all sorts of subsidiary commotions—just as in a telephone wire one might hear not only the voice of the speaker but the church bells of the spire near which it passes—then it must be said that nerve-associations however “dynamical” they may be declared to be, are yet not trains of thought. How absurd, in point of fact, is much of this quasi-scientific language when applied to the mind! We might, perhaps, understand how material nervous tracts are “associated” or “agglutinated,” or subject to an “organic nexus:” but what on earth is the meaning of the “organic nexus” which binds one phase of consciousness to another? Is thought something which can be tied on to another thought so that the two can now hang together? Or is it not rather a complex idea, a unity of fused or transformed elements, which can only be due to the activity of a real and independent and immaterial mind?

2. We pass to another mental faculty, with which long habit has made us familiar, but the exact operation of which is hardly short of a mystery—I mean the faculty of memory. It is memory, of course, which renders possible any accumulation of knowledge. It is equally memory which renders possible any large exercise of constructive and imaginative skill. In its two forms it lies at the foundation of what we understand by consciousness, its passive form being that which is called retentive or organic memory, and its active form, reproductive. It is by means of memory that those laws of mental association become possible which have been made of such use in explaining the train of our ideas and our processes of thought. Association works either through similarity of impressions or contiguity, whether in time or space. That is to say, we either associate together ideas or impressions which resemble one another, or which have come into our consciousness near each other, in neighbouring parts of space or successive moments of time. But only on the presupposition of memory can either form of association be realized.

Now can there be any physical explanation of memory? At first sight the answer seems certainly, yes. We are able to revive past impressions because of the existence of those nervous tracts or channels through which the ordinary impressions reached us. That there is a physical basis for memory

seems extremely probable. But that we can thus explain the whole operation of memory is a very different question. We must here distinguish the two forms of memory mentioned above, the passive or retentive function and the active or reproductive. With regard to the first of these the physical basis is obvious. For it is probable that every action of a stimulus or an end-organ of sense, and every transmission of energy through nervous fibres and cells, considerably, and perhaps permanently, affect the general nervous mechanism, just as in photography a plate of dry collodion, after a brief exposure to the sun's rays, retains for weeks in the darkness the effects of those delicate changes which it has undergone. We can get at this result by several commonplace experiments. We are jolted all day in a train, and for the next day and sometimes for succeeding days the same jolting motion continues in our consciousness, as a sort of abiding companion of all our other mental states. In the case of vision, there is an after image impressed, as it were, on the retina which we can call up into consciousness for some time whenever we will. Or again, it is difficult to explain how certain actions become habitual without supposing some permanent alteration in our nervous energies. Thus knitting, or playing on the piano, which at first involve a series of acts of will, finally proceed with such regularity that we become unconscious of the accompanying nervous processes. There can be no doubt that there is every kind of interaction between the cells and fibres of our sensory and muscular system. Every activity leaves its mark or trace in an altered capacity or acquired tendency. And the many freaks of memory of which we have daily experience seem themselves to argue a physical and material explanation in the relative position of certain neural processes. That all this proves a physical basis for memory, so far as it is a retentive function, seems certain. Still it must be remarked that while such explanations show why we remember one thing rather than another, *granted that we can remember at all*, they hardly render clear and precise the possibility of memory itself. For the retentive function, so far as it is unconscious, is not what we mean by memory. Conscious memory doubtless presupposes all the range and sphere of retentive capacity. Still, unless it is conscious, it forms no more a part of what we include in our mental life than that vague phantasmagoria of dreams which we leave behind us when we rise from our beds.

What can we say, however, of active, reproductive memory? Can we give any physical explanation of this?

The problem and mystery of memory is that that mental state which we recall is both present and absent at one and the same moment. It is present because we remember it and because it enters into our immediate consciousness; yet it is absent, because it is some past state which we experienced yesterday or a week ago. How can we say that some after image resembles some original impression when that impression *itself* has gone and can never be recovered? By what proximity of nerve tracts can we explain this wonderful power? For its essence seems to lie in the capacity to annul the conditions of time. The past is not the past for us, when we remember, but the present. On the other hand, all those intimations which we derive through our senses are subject to the conditions of time; they have their before and after, and their natural sequences. Yet the active memory defies the conditions of its own data. It defies time itself, and seems to be above it. How can such a phenomenon be explained? Is not the obvious explanation also the necessary one, that the mind has laws of its own apart from those laws which enter into that physical organism of which it makes so much use?

3. I will refer to only one more fact of our mental life, which is the largest and most comprehensive of all. We know now many of the conditions on which consciousness seems to depend, albeit that consciousness itself being the condition of all our internal experience is necessarily incapable of any definition. We can speak of the organ of consciousness, just as we can point out its physical pre-requisites. Consciousness is clearly dependent on the character and amount of blood supply; for to stop the supply is to put an end to consciousness, and to corrupt it is to depress and disturb consciousness. Moreover the character of the circulation of the blood seems to affect profoundly the phenomena of consciousness, quickened circulation meaning more acute perception, and slower circulation involving tardier mental processes. We have learnt, too, to fix on the brain, in the case of man, as pre-eminently the organ of consciousness; only meaning, however, by such an assertion that the activity of the nervous matter within the cerebrum is intimately connected with all mental phenomena and that outside things can only affect consciousness, if they get themselves as it were imprinted upon or represented by cerebral processes. But if from consciousness, in the general sense of the term, we pass to *self-consciousness*, the problem is altered. For the marvellous thing about *self-consciousness* is that in it the

mind recognises itself as the subject of its own states, and recognises these states as its own. The mind, as it were, appears to itself and links every mental state together by the bond that they all belong to its one self. What does any man mean by speaking of his own personality, except that he is conscious of himself as being the one identical being who has had every kind of experience and undergone various mental phases and knows them all as his own? How can there be any material substratum, analogous or correspondent to self-consciousness? The question is almost absurd. How can any physiological process represent this faculty of self-consciousness, when we can conceive of no relation between them which could bring them into any intelligible correspondence—when one remains a process, while the other is a flash of self-identifying power? We hardly know what it is which we are going to set about to attempt to describe. Self-consciousness is the unique property of a mind which is so real that it can appear to itself.

We must not shrink from the conclusion to which these and many other considerations which might be mentioned seem to tend. If we were to say that there was by the side of the physical and nervous organism, a real mind with conditions of its own, and developing according to laws of its own, we should seem to be relapsing into the old dualism of Descartes, and be exposed to the difficulties of understanding how two alien natures could act on each other. That may be so: and perhaps we have not even yet got much further than the assertion that the spiritual is not the physical and the physical not the spiritual. But one dogma I think we can hold fast; that if there be a real being in the universe, it is not the physical but the mental which alone throws light on the physical and enables us to understand it. The real is the mind, over and above all other realities. Further questions as to mind and matter and their mutual relations, and whether we can find some ultimate point or power which comprehends them both, and in which they become fused—whether that point or that power be called Absolute Spirit or God—would lead us into some of the most abstruse problems of Metaphysics and make us far overpass the bounds of our present subject.

---

The CHAIRMAN (D. HOWARD, Esq., D.L., F.C.S.).—We have all listened with very great interest to Dr. Courtney's admirable Paper, and I am sure I may present to him our best thanks. (Applause.) It is somewhat disheartening to find the very old doubts about personality and about self-identity coming back as the result of our modern learning, and yet on the other hand it is, perhaps, encouraging to find that they are the *same* old doubts. When one finds that the doubts about personality which existed at the time of Buddha and the Yogas, that the very problems which perplexed the mind 2,000 years ago and a good deal more, are brought up as the result of our nineteenth century science, I think it is encouraging to know that they cannot be the necessary result of modern science, because they existed so long ago. They may be brought into prominence by it, but they cannot be the result of it as they pre-existed so long, and it is well to have brought to us, clearly and distinctly, as we have in this Paper, how little modern discoveries about the brain and consciousness from the physical side really affect the question. It is well to remember that the old difficulty of the problem put by Descartes, about the mind and the physical basis of the mind, is not the only perplexity. It is no worse perplexity than that of attempting really to understand how the sun's light reaches the earth through a medium which we call ether, but of which we know absolutely nothing—the properties of which are so perplexing that if we reason about them we arrive at the conclusion that it is an absolutely non-elastic solid. When we find these hopeless perplexities in the best understood branches of science, no wonder in the more obscure ones there should be quite as great perplexities. Therefore I think we may take comfort from that.

It is well that we should frankly acknowledge that the mind is so much connected with the brain that it is hardly too much to say that the brain's connection with the mind is as intimate as the dependence of a violinist on his violin. It would be easy to give him one so bad that it would be impossible for him to play on it, and yet nobody in their senses would say that the violin was the cause of Joachim's wonderful playing. It is the necessary organ thereof, but certainly not the cause of it, and one does not confuse in one's thoughts the violin and the violinist.

I am specially struck by the explanation on the point so clearly put in the Paper in reference to attention. We must remember

that it is not merely the power of seeing or listening to one thing or another, but at the same moment different people may be, with exactly the same sounds reaching their ears, attending, at their will, to totally different things. Take the case of a string quartet—four people are sitting together at an equal distance from the performers, and therefore the actual physical impressions on their ears must be exactly identical, and those four may each of them attend to each of the parts and at a given moment they may agree to attend to other parts—all of them with the same physical cause of hearing of one or another of the parts. That is merely one example of the problem of Attention which those who maintain the merely materialistic view of the mind have to get over.

The points raised in the Paper are all very clearly and admirably put, and it does seem to me to be a subject that we cannot too boldly face. The mind is so intimately connected with the brain that it is absurd to ignore the connection, but on the other hand we cannot too clearly bear in mind that all that has been offered us by physiologists does not bring us one atom nearer the understanding of self than the perplexities of Buddha, on the one hand, or the arguments of Descartes on the other. There are a good many here who have thought on and studied the subject, and I hope they will give us the benefit of their experience.

Mr. A. H. ELWIN.—It is not my intention to criticise the Paper, but I would like to call attention to an important theory that has not been fully touched on this evening; I have heard it called one of Professor Huxley's theories of *thought-molecules*. It so happens that I have very good reason to know that this thought-molecule idea was in vogue over forty-six years ago, but of course in a different form. We had not got so far at that time as to put it into present-day scientific language, but if I understand the thought-molecule idea rightly, or what I prefer to call the sensation-molecule idea, for that is more comprehensive; it means that for every sensation which is received, whether by the ears, eyes, or feeling, some kind of image (not necessarily a picture), but some little thing is formed in the brain somewhere, or connected with the brain, and not so material as the brain itself, and perfectly indestructible, that forms a record. I think in that idea we get an explanation of memory, in fact, of all the phenomena referred to this evening.



Mr. T. BARKWORTH.—It is of course impossible for so vast and complex a subject as the nature of mind to be dealt with adequately within the compass of a single Paper. More especially is this evident when we come to consider the various systems and almost countless works that have been produced in connection with the question, What is Mind? Nor is the result encouraging to the study of Metaphysics. For the only sure progress that seems to have been made, leading to ascertained conclusions, is in the direction of inductive research, and the mode of investigation has necessarily become the property of the physiologist rather than of the metaphysician. Nevertheless there is one important category of mental phenomena without considering which no survey of the nature of mind can be regarded as complete—I mean the automatic processes of mental action. It has been too much the fashion to speak of the mind in relation to consciousness, and to disregard those unconscious actions which nevertheless occasionally display a very high order of intelligence. When the author speaks of the mind, does he mean the mind that directs these unconscious proceedings, or the mind that is preoccupied and absorbed simultaneously with a totally different subject? To take one or two examples by way of illustration. A man is threading his way through a crowded street while his mind is deeply engrossed with some scientific or political question; he pays no attention to the state of the thoroughfare, and will very likely end by finding himself at some more familiar destination than the one he intended to make for.

Again, mental automatism is even more interesting than physical. Thus, it has been found possible to add up long columns of figures, or play through a piece of music at sight, while the attention is so absorbed in a train of thought, that the individual is unconscious not only of what he is doing, but even of where he is. Is it the conscious or unconscious mind which is the real self? These and similar instances would alone have been sufficient to throw doubt upon any view of mind which regarded it as a single homogeneous entity. I cannot enter further into this interesting subject to-night. But the dualism of mind in the form of a primary and secondary consciousness, or, as I should prefer to call them, an active and passive personality, which may be broadly classified as volitional and ratiocinative on the one hand, and automatic and emotional on the other, may, I think, be now considered as established, not

on the basis of metaphysical speculation, but on that of experimental research, and of results which may be repeated as often as is required for purposes of demonstration.

Rev. G. LYON TURNER, M.A.—At the outset, I should like to say that, unlike the previous speaker, I am prepared, on the whole, thoroughly to agree with the position taken in the Paper, but I should like to ask Dr. Courtney whether, in reference to Kant's position on page 201, he has not expressed himself in a way which would rather mislead those who are not acquainted with Kant's system. The distinction between formal and material elements of knowledge is not a distinction that corresponds with mental and material in the ordinary sense of the word. In Kant's phraseology, the words "form" and "matter" are used as the names of the two elements which form an empirical intuition. Both of these elements, like the intuition which they form, in their nature, are mental or immaterial; but the "matter," according to Kant's own putting of it, is sensation. The forms "material" and "immaterial" in this connection, therefore, are both used in a very peculiar sense; so that, I think, any one reading that paragraph of the Paper for the first time, without a previous acquaintance with Kant's system, might form an erroneous idea of his position. With some portions of the first part of the paper, however, I cannot agree; and it is mainly to insist on those points being put with as great accuracy as possible, that I draw attention to them. In reference to the two questions raised by Dr. Courtney, "What is Mind?" and "Where is it?" I must confess I should be inclined to answer them in the opposite way to that in which Dr. Courtney has given his answer. (i.) "What is Mind?" I think Dr. Courtney has shown very clearly that that is a question we can answer precisely and satisfactorily as far as we can go. Negatively, it is not material, and this the whole Paper goes to prove, I think, in a very masterly way, so that it cannot be identified with the brain which is only its natural organ. Positively, we can say it is that immaterial or spiritual something which feels, thinks, desires, and wills, as Dr. Courtney said at the end of the Paper, which as a whole contains a great deal that is valuable and worth thinking over. (ii.) The question, "Where is Mind?" I would submit, is a question which in the very nature of the case is unanswerable—a question to which no answer can be given. All the arguments proving it to be immaterial, put that

question wholly out of court. And for this reason. The question "Where is a thing?" means—"in what place" is it to be found? That again means—"what particular portion of space" does it occupy? But such a question can be answered only of the material. In fact, the one characteristic of matter as contrasted with spirit, or everything that is immaterial,—such as different kinds of forces,—is its occupancy of space. That is the most specific characteristic of all things belonging to the order of things which we call matter; and the fundamental law of all material things is that each material object or atom, at any one moment of time, occupies one particular portion of space, and is unable at the same time to occupy any other. So that every material object at any one time has one particular place. That is its "*where*," or its position. You can ask the question "Where is it?" and, pointing to the position in space where it is to be found—that precise portion of space which it occupies,—you may say in answer, "It is there." Further, as occupying a definite limited portion of space, it has a certain size, which in answer to the question, "How much space does it occupy?" and a certain shape; which is an answer to the question, "What is the geometrical character of its *space-limit*?" But none of these questions, from the very nature of the case, can be put in reference to mind or things mental; because they are immaterial. You cannot assign to anything mental—say sensation, thought, or wish—any definite shape or size, so that you could say, "taste is round," and "sound is square," nor can you say of any of them that they measure so many millimetres in length, and so on. And much less can you say any of these things of the mind itself. Shape and size it has none. But if so neither has it position; simply because, in its intrinsic nature, it has no space-relation whatever, and, therefore, there can be no space-relation between mind and body. We cannot then be too careful to avoid apparently materialising the mind while we are seeking to establish the fact that it is immaterial and spiritual. Those things which involve space-relation can only be said of its material organism, which is that particular parcel of matter with which we (*i.e.*, each "mind" or "self") are connected more closely than any other. As to the relation between the two, it is an old-standing puzzle which I suppose will never be solved. One expression, used by Dr. Courtney, I think, may be selected as on the whole the

best for all scientific as well as practical purposes; and that is, that the body or the brain is the "organ" of the mind. Provided only we use it in the sense of the Greek term "organon"; defining "organ" as the material condition or *sine quâ non* of its self-manifestation and communication with the world around it, both in material objects and mental personalities.

MR. ARTHUR BOUTWOOD.—There is one important aspect of the question before us which has not been noticed this evening—I mean the relation in which it stands to the philosophy of Religion. Religion is concerned with the relations between the Divine and the human. God and the human soul, these are the two ultimate realities which it presents to us, and with the relations between which it deals. To-night we are asked to consider questions concerning the reality of one of these two related terms, the soul, and according as we are or are not able to furnish a reasonable account of our belief in the reality of the self—of our belief that it actually is something not less real than any of the objects around us, and not some merely hypothetical existence—shall we be able to lay the foundation of an adequate philosophy of religion.

In the first place, let us ask "What do we mean by reality?" and "How do we learn about it?" An abstract definition of reality is perhaps impossible, but in answer to both questions, we may say that reality is made known to us in and by experience. If we could analyse our knowledge—our knowledge, I say, as distinguished from our opinions and beliefs—and throw it into a series of propositions, we should, I think, find ourselves face to face with statements like this, "I perceive this thing, A," and in the experience or consciousness which these propositions would express, we should find our sole ground for affirming the existence of anything—the sole basis of our knowledge of reality. The two questions I have just mentioned are philosophical rather than scientific, and we can seek for the answer to them only in the realm of self-consciousness. There, among the primitive data of consciousness, we find revealed the existence of independent but related realities belonging to two categories, on the one hand we have the perceiving self, on the other, the perceived things. The consciousness of reality, whether pertaining to subject or object, is ultimate and unanalysable, but that unique experience is the only ground we have for affirming the existence of any reality,

and it is a valid ground for affirming the reality of the perceiving self precisely in the same degree as it is for affirming that of the things perceived. The reality we affirm for the self is of precisely the same kind as that which we affirm for the object of perception, for the constituents of the external world of things. The predominant influence of physical science often leads men to speak as though evidence of reality must lie in something visible, tangible, material. In the last analysis it will be found that, even for the things of nature,—for the objects with which physical science deals,—the sole test and evidence of reality lies in that inner consciousness of reality which is available in the same manner and to the same degree for the immaterial self. It should be remembered that much of the language of physical science is largely hypothetical or suppositional, arising from the speculative interpretation, rather than from the positive observation of Nature and experience, due in short to the process which the Byzantine logicians called *suppositio*.

As to Professor Huxley's contention that the ultimate proposition of psychology is "thoughts, feelings, and volitions exist," I will only say that it indicates the straits into which the exigencies of an arbitrarily preconceived theory may lead a man. It is, as Lotze remarks, singular that those who profess to be positive and empirical in method should, at the very outset, arbitrarily mutilate the real ultimates of psychology as they are given in experience, and thus start their speculation from a basis as unreal as any adopted by the thinkers they condemn.

Dr. Courtney's Paper was largely occupied with a defence of our affirmation of the reality of the soul. Now, this is doubtless of great importance, but I think we should constantly keep very clearly in mind the distinction between declaring the ground of an affirmation, and defending that affirmation from adverse criticism. We are apt, I fear, to lay too much stress upon the work of defence, and too apt to embark upon long trains of professedly demonstrative ratiocination. We should remember that the instruments of dialectic will never lead us to the apprehension of reality, this can only be given by and through experience. The ultimate truths with which we are concerned are *premises*, not *conclusions*, and are to be sought among the data of consciousness, rather than among the results of our reasoning. They are given antecedent to and not consequent upon the operations of reason.

Reference was made by the speaker who preceded me to an argument which is put with the greatest force and clearness in the works of the late T. H. Green. That writer, indeed, seems to have said almost the last word upon the subject we are considering this evening. Particularly valuable is that part of his *Prolegomena to Ethics* which deals with "the spiritual principle in Knowledge." In one place Mr. Green points out that our knowledge is a knowledge of related things and events, of things and events, past and present, which stand in certain definite relations one to the other in time and space. "We speak," he says, "of a world of things," of "a universe of things," thus indicating our belief that the objects of Nature around us form parts of an organised system of related things, and he urges, with great force, as it seems to me, that the subject which embraces the data of its experience in the unity of such a system must be something different from any of the objects with which it thus deals. No member of a series of objects or phenomena can, he contends, be knowledge of that series as a series. Further, in dealing with memory, he points out that it is not simply the revival of a past sensation, but something very different, namely, the recollection that, at a certain time, and in a certain place, I had such an experience. May I add that in considering this question I have derived much indirect assistance from a careful study of Rosmini's *Origin of Ideas*.

The AUTHOR.—I ought to begin by thanking those who have spoken for the kindness with which they have received the few remarks I have been able to make on this subject; and I think they fully recognise, as I certainly do myself, how difficult it is to get into a short Paper the various considerations which would occur to one in dealing with a subject of this complexity and immensity.

The point which is of extreme interest to all of us exists in the relation, which has been touched on by one of the speakers, between unconscious and conscious force of mind—between automatic functions and those which cannot be described as automatic. In the illustration given by Mr. Barkworth it was urged that a man can walk through the streets of London without being conscious of where he is, though all the time he gets straight to his destination. That is true, and it is in regard to all those phenomena of ordinary life that I tried, if I may say so frankly, to give as much as I could possibly conceive of the physiological

side of the argument, and this it was which got me into trouble with another of the speakers on the question of the mind's locality. Returning to that illustration, the question, to my mind, is simply this. If you take your man, walking, say through the streets, and going through a number of particular automatic processes, let us bring him to his counting house or office, or whatever it may be, and let him have presented before him a sudden problem, or difficulty of trade or business, or what not, with which he deals; I want to know which is the real man, the one who has been walking through the street, or the one who is suddenly confronted with such a problem?—which is his real mind?—or rather, which are the processes with which psychology should deal? There can be no doubt that the real man is the man who in consciousness deals with the new problem which comes before him and to which he devotes all the attention he can. That is the real man. It is the life of consciousness and intelligence that throws light on the automatic without which intelligent life cannot proceed, as I have tried to show in the Paper.\* I am

---

\* It would require another lecture to put the difference between Mr. Barkworth and myself clearly. It is the whole difference between a man who believes in a spiritualistic hypothesis and one who regards the mechanism as at least as important as the informing intelligence.

Every one recognises that there are unconscious automatic acts. Why not? We have a body which in its structure and in its functions is simply a mechanism of a higher kind. What difficulty is there in its often working in a purely mechanical fashion? This is all that Mr. Barkworth's illustration seems to me to prove, and when he asks me, whether I mean by "mind" that which directs these unconscious proceedings or that which is preoccupied with a different subject, I answer neither and both. The mind does not always direct unconscious proceedings any more than the engineer is always directing separate bits of machinery. In the last resort, however, it is the engineer who is mainly responsible, as we see directly he has a different piece of work to turn out. Why the possession of an organism with a nicely balanced adjustment of means and ends, should disprove the existence of a rational soul I cannot conceive.

The ordinary staff could bring out a daily newspaper five days out of six, but if a particular policy is to be inaugurated, the presence of the editor is required. W. L. COURTNEY.

aware that it is almost impossible to frame one's language so as to avoid materialistic suggestions. I do not intend to concede so much, perhaps, as appears in print—I do not wish to define mind at all in the terms of matter—I do not wish to bind myself rigidly by the phrase that the mind is in the brain. I merely mean to state this, that anyhow we have to acknowledge that there is no thinking without the brain, and however we frame our conception of mind we must fall back on some material basis for those laws which apply to these automatic processes, and which everywhere accompany intelligence.

Another point which was suggested to me was a possible arrangement of words which might lead to confusion in regard to the theory of Kant, and I am very much obliged for having it pointed out to me. At the same time, perhaps, if you compare and consider the bare process he calls aesthetic with that which he calls analytic and intelligent, you will see the difference. "Material" is no doubt used in a way that may lead to confusion in the sentence referred to, but I only used it as an illustration, and only desire to do so. The question, I think, of thought-molecules is an extremely interesting point, and, as far as I know, I think it is useful to compare Professor Clifford's theory about mind-stuff and brain-stuff, but I am afraid I do not know sufficient of the subject to say much.

Let me add one word. Of course I wish it quite clearly understood that the whole position intended to be suggested by this Paper is that, granting all that you like about "explanation of mind-processes," so far as it goes, there remain certain characteristics and things about this self of ours which can *not* be put in materialistic language, but which can be understood as a revelation of spirit to spirit. That is a view which I cannot get rid of myself, and one which I desire to maintain to the utmost of my powers, and I owe much to those (and I think there are a good many who are in that position) who sympathise with me in it. (Applause.)

The Meeting was then adjourned.



## REMARKS ON THE FOREGOING PAPER.

The Rev. H. J. CLARKE writes:—

I cannot hope to be able to do justice in a few words to the able and profoundly thoughtful paper, "On the Reality of the Self." The writer, as it appears to me, has successfully exposed the fallacy of the materialistic theory in dealing with the two questions he has undertaken to answer.

In considering, however, *where* the mind resides, I am hardly disposed to allow that, in speaking of the brain as "its seat" or "home," we are using language which is "*merely* poetical and metaphorical;" for on the assumption that there is a subject of sense and consciousness distinct from the organic conditions by which they are determined, science teaches that its immediate interactions with the organ by means of which it exercises these functions, take place within the brain.

With respect to the question, *what* is the mind? I think that, in commenting on the theories of "Occasionalism" and "Pre-established Harmony," the writer might have made it apparent that they are *gratuitous*. For if the absolutely antithetical dissimilarity, in regard to essence, between spirit and matter may be held to admit of the conception that the latter is ruled by an Almighty and Eternal Spirit, it cannot be alleged that interaction in the case of a spirit and an organised body is inconceivable. The intellectual difficulty which seemed to necessitate one or the other of these theories, exists only for the *imagination*. If we endeavour to apprehend the process of change in space-occupying substance, it resolves itself intimately into re-arrangement effected by movement in space; but we cannot picture to ourselves movement produced otherwise than as communicated by impact from something which occupies space. In mental *pictures*, origination and spontaneity can find no place: they are cognisable only in our consciousness, whereby we are made acquainted with truths which are fundamental, and too deep to be reached by any effort of imagination.

The writer makes valuable remarks in showing that there can be no adequate physical explanation of memory. The real existence and continuity of the individual appear to me to be demonstrated by his ability to resume in consciousness experiences through which he passed in years long gone by, and thus to recognise as his own states of thought and feeling which, from the materialistic point of view, were those of another person. Unless there be an underlying soul, which receives the impressions made upon the brain, it is not apparent how the reproduction of the latter can bring about identification.

The Rev. J. J. LIAS, M.A., writes :—

Mr. Courtney's reputation stands too high for any one to venture upon the attitude of a "superior person" towards him. I must therefore content myself with a few humble suggestions.

The thanks of us all are due to Mr. Courtney for his habit of eschewing verbiage, and going straight to the root of the matter. Nevertheless I would venture to express a doubt whether he is quite right in saying that mind can only be defined in part. As regards abstract metaphysical definition he is no doubt right. As I have myself said before the Institute, abstract metaphysical definition seems to be an impossibility. You have only to require the definer to define each term he uses in his definition to reduce all attempts at definition to an absurdity. But definition by examples is always possible. And mind can thus be defined as the force or energy which produces certain results. The nature of that force or energy may be inferred from those results and from the mode in which they are obtained. And without attempting to carry this line of inquiry further (which is to me impossible at present) it would seem clear that mind belongs to the same category as force, and to be, as far as we are able to judge, outside the sphere of matter altogether, although continually acting upon it, and known to us chiefly through the medium of such action. I say chiefly, not exclusively, because the action of mind is also known to us through our consciousness, and consciousness, although also expressing itself through physical media, appears also to rest on a basis outside the world of sense. I confess, therefore, that on page 196 I should have preferred to have used the term "organ" in preference to "seat" in regard to the relation of the brain to conscious mental states. I mean that I look upon the brain not as the ultimate home of consciousness, but as the medium whereby facts are transmitted from the ultra-physical to the physical world. So again when Descartes is represented (page 197) as saying that the soul "exists in the brain," it would surely be more in accordance with facts to say that it operates through the brain. Again (pages 197-8), I would ask if the words "absolutely distinct" and "absolutely antithetical" can be fairly considered as synonymous. I am "absolutely distinct," in regard to the process of volition, from any other human being; yet I trust I am not therefore "absolutely antithetical." And if not "absolutely antithetical," there is no reason why I should not influence another. So with matter and mind; they are "absolutely distinct" in their essential nature. But that does not preclude relations between them, though we may be quite incapable of understanding how such relations are produced. The phrase "absolutely antithetical" seems to assume the impossibility of such relations, and therefore to be in direct opposition to the facts.

But these are but spots in the sun. The rest of Mr. Courtney's paper seems to me unanswerably to demonstrate the existence of an order of being beyond the material world.

Mr. JOSEPH JOHN MURPHY writes:—

In regard to Dr. Courtney's Paper there are but two subjects on which I wish to offer a few remarks.

The reality of the self is not a question. Self is constituted by the consciousness of self. The fact we have to do with, is a self which is conscious of itself as having thoughts, and of being related to the past in memory and to the future in expectation.

Much however may be said on the way in which this self-conscious self has been developed out of the germ of sensation, and on the nature of the relation in which it stands to the world of matter which surrounds it. This latter is identical with the world-old question of the relation between mind and body.

On this latter subject Dr. Courtney says, "The mind and brain stand to one another, Lewes and Bain tell us, as convex and concave sides of the same arc. The two aspects are of one identical thing. Viewed from one position the arc is concave, from another it is convex; and so, viewed from different stand-points, the same phenomenon is now a material motion, and now a conscious process of the mind. We ought to speak of a double-faced unity showing itself both as mental and as corporeal. This is plausible at all events." I quote this in order to point out that, even if it is accepted as perfectly true so far as it goes, it is scarcely an appropriate illustration, and appears to me to throw no light on the question. To such intellects as ours, the convex and concave sides of an arc imply each other and suggest each other, and the properties of the one side are deducible from those of the other. But to such intellects as ours, motion and thought do not suggest each other, and the properties of the one are not deducible from those of the other. In other words, the convex and the concave sides of an arc belong to the same sphere of thought and the same order of being: motion and thought, whether or not they belong to the same order of being, certainly do not when considered objectively, belong to the same sphere of thought.

THE AUTHOR'S FINAL REPLY.

The only thing, I think, I need add—apart from my gratitude for extremely friendly criticisms—is that I am inclined to think that I was wrong in introducing, as though they were parallel questions, the question of the *locality* of mind and the question of its *nature*. The two inquiries are, of course, really incommensurate to anyone who adopts a spiritualistic hypothesis. The “place where” is answered in terms of space and time: the “essence” or “innermost nature” has nothing to do with either temporal or local conditions.

---